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Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Soroptimist International welcomes an inclusive and human rights-based approach to the sustainable development goals. Those goals must be transformative and address the fundamental inequalities between people that continue to perpetuate discrimination. Non-governmental organizations and civil society have a vital role to play in raising awareness about the sustainable development goals, their implementation, their monitoring and evaluation, and in the development of effective programmes within communities that will ensure no one is left behind. Cooperative partnerships between non-governmental organizations, governments, the United Nations and other stakeholders including civil society are critical in achieving the goals and equality for all.

The Millennium Development Goals should be celebrated for laying the foundations of a progressive, transformative and inclusive development framework. The sustainable development goals need to further that legacy and ensure that no one is left behind. The ongoing multi-stakeholder consultation process surrounding the post-2015 agenda should be applauded and gives cause for optimism, but it can also be improved. It is critical that non-governmental organizations and civil society are not only consulted but also listened to and not merely co-opted into a development agenda that does not reflect the needs of the stakeholders non-governmental organizations represent. The specific role of non-governmental organizations, as accountable organisations who have developed expertise in implementing, monitoring and evaluating grassroots change, must be secured within the post-2015 agenda.

For the sustainable development agenda to be successful all stakeholders must have the ability to shape, influence and implement that agenda as well as build capacity. Civil society and non-governmental organizations can achieve transformational breakthroughs to achieve a sustainably developed world. They are also able to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving the agenda. Therefore, partnerships between non-governmental organizations, civil society, governments and the United Nations at all stages of implementation, monitoring and evaluation are an integral part of sustainable development.

There is growing interest in initiatives that encourage public contribution to and engagements with sustainable development. It is critical that non-governmental organizations and civil society are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of the sustainable development goals, including contributing to negotiations and discussions on targets and indicators. By better including non-governmental organizations and civil society in the development and implementation of the sustainable development agenda, it is possible to avoid many of the structural deficiencies that limited the success of the Millennium Development Goals.

Non-governmental organizations are well placed to:

(a) promote the successful implementation of the sustainable development goals;

(b) contribute to the achievement of targets;

(c) raise awareness about the sustainable development goals, especially amongst vulnerable and marginalised groups and remote communities;

(d) identify and better understand differing contexts, settings and approaches taken by communities to sustainable development;

(e) gather information for indicators and assess progress towards achieving agreed targets; and

(f) enable the empowerment of civil society to participate in sustainable development activities, and through those activities realise the human rights of individuals and promote economic and social development.

Current government capacity and resources are not enough to achieve the sustainable development goals. Non-governmental organizations are able to increase capacity through their networks and roll out sustainable development programmes effectively. They are the accountable organisations that will be able to implement the perspectives of civil society into sustainable development programmes. This involvement would enhance the legitimacy of programmes within communities and vulnerable and marginalised groups. Simply, the post-2015 agenda will not be achieved without the better inclusion of non-governmental organizations and civil society.

Therefore, non-governmental organizations and civil society must be involved in negotiations and in indicator and target decision-making processes. Non-governmental organizations are also able to specifically contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the sustainable development goals, and not just to their creation and implementation. Improved non-governmental organizations and civil society involvement would also promote successful cooperative partnerships between non-governmental organizations, governments and the United Nations that would be able to be target focussed.

Women and girls comprise the majority of people living in poverty, and experience persistent and multidimensional inequalities. Gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the full realisation of their human rights is critical to sustainable development and essential for poverty eradication. This is clearly stated in the Doha Declaration.

The means of implementing and financing the sustainable development goals is not gender-neutral. If and how financial resources are mobilised has clear implications for women's human rights and the achievement of gender equality; gender equality must be considered as a means to implement the sustainable development goals and as a critical policy measure for countries who want to achieve their full development potential. The sustainable development goals, Financing for Development and means of implementation cannot be considered separately from each other. Instead, a cohesive, integrated and complimentary approach must be agreed for the post-2015 development agenda to be successful.

Currently, there is no mention in the Financing for Development Zero Draft of dedicated resources to advance gender equality. This is unacceptable, and must be rectified in order to manage the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals. Financing for Development must reinforce the consideration that women and girls are at a higher risk of being left behind and reflect the essential need to better facilitate the inclusion of women and girls in

development. These principles and needs were clearly substantiated in the oral submission of the joint statement on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Financing for Development Zero Draft, 2nd drafting session, and should be supported and integrated into the means of implementation discussion.

Financing for Development must contribute to the achievement of social development and so requires unbiased monitoring and evaluation that prioritises citizens. Public-private partnerships should demonstrate competencies in contributing to the achievement of agreed sustainable and social development principles and goals as outlined in the Rio Declaration, the Copenhagen Declaration, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Public-private partnerships have the ability to benefit all, but they may also promote the outsourcing of social development to the private sector, with its own interests resulting in development programmes that do not prioritise the needs of vulnerable and marginalised people. Unbiased monitoring and evaluation is essential to promote full compliance with previously agreed declarations. Non-governmental organizations, as accountable stakeholder organisations, have a specific role to play in ensuring that financing for development mechanisms produce the results needed for an inclusive post-2015 agenda to be successful.

The sustainable development goals must take into account that certain groups, such as women and girls, are at a higher risk of being left behind. It should be recognised that civil society and non-governmental organizations, and especially feminist and women's organisations, have a role in preventing that from happening, and ensuring that women are equal participants in a sustainable development agenda as they are effective and implementing change at a grassroots level. The Millennium Development Goals galvanised the principle of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through development (Goal 3). The sustainable development goals must further that principle; women must be included at all levels of decision making regarding the Sustainable development goals and their implementation.

It must be noted that several critical issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women were not adequately addressed by the Millennium Development Goals, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, economic empowerment, eliminating violence against women and girls, and education, in accordance with the Rio Declaration, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The principles and actions outlined in these declarations must be integrated throughout the post-2015 agenda and addressed through the Sustainable development goals.

That the sustainable development goals are currently 'aspirational global targets' and can be adjusted for 'national circumstances', (Preamble paragraph 18) is of concern. Although it is important for policies to achieve sustainable development and for gender equality to be contextualised, culturally specific and tailored to communities, there is the potential for national agendas to dilute the strength and purpose of the sustainable development to the disadvantage of all. Unnecessary flexibility in the sustainable development goals could leave women and girls particularly vulnerable, as current disparities will continue, potentially be exacerbated, and progress will be negated.

The sustainable development goals must reaffirm and contribute to the fulfilment of commitments to achieving gender equality that have already been

agreed and ratified. Those commitments must also be integrated throughout the sustainable development goals in the form of human rights-based, gender sensitive approaches with proper monitoring and enforceable accountability mechanisms. Only if this is done will the Sustainable development goals be meaningful, achievable and effective.

A renewed focus on addressing the implementation, monitoring and financing of the sustainable development goals could create a set of goals which we can achieve together. It is the hope of Soroptimists that the sustainable development goals will promote the education, empowerment and enabling of women. Only then will women become equal participants and contributors to their communities and countries. Helping women and girls who are amongst the most vulnerable requires an integrated, gender sensitive approach and evidence-based responses. Implementation strategies provide an opportunity to involve civil society and affected groups in collaborative work and partnerships in order to promote the achievement of the sustainable Development Goals. This is what it will take to manage the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals.